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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 001045

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TAGS: [SNAR](#) [PGOV](#) [KCRM](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: BROKERING ERADICATION CONSENSUS IN HELMAND

REF: A. KABUL 1014
[1](#)B. KABUL 218

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald E. Neumann for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The environment for conducting poppy eradication in Helmand remains problematic. The USG-funded Afghan Eradication Force (AEF) has met repeated interference from local forces in Helmand, and each day brings a new round of negotiations in an effort to keep eradication going. However, single days of high eradication--including 1060 hectares on March 29--punctuate layoffs due to local political interference. Ambassador informed President Karzai on March 27 that the AEF needs the freedom to eradicate an additional 5000 hectares (10,000 in total) in Helmand. Karzai visited Helmand on March 29. He had committed to carry this message to provincial and ISAF officials who have been inhospitable to eradication efforts, but we do not yet have a read-out on what he did. END SUMMARY

NEGOTIATIONS, NEGOTIATIONS, NEGOTIATIONS...

[1](#)2. (C) The Ministry of Interior's INL-funded Afghan Eradication Force (AEF) resumed activity on March 29 after suspending operations on March 26 following a single-day record of 593 hectares in Nawayi Barakazayi district that antagonized local forces and necessitated moving their forward operating base (FOB). On March 29, the AEF eradicated an unprecedented 1060 hectares, and its 2007 total now stands at 6220 hectares.

[1](#)3. (C) The March 26 suspension of operations was due to district- and provincial-level pressure to move the AEF's FOB. Their effectiveness in Nad Ali district and southern Nawayi Barakazayi district had made the AEF unpopular in the region, provoking demonstrations and necessitating a move to a more secure location. The AEF is now operating out of Bost Airfield (7 km south of Lashkar Gah). Embassy, in coordination with the Ministry of Interior, has concluded several agreements over the past three weeks with provincial and district officials to allow for continued and less restricted eradication, but these agreements tend to dissipate within a day or two after the AEF destroys a few

hundred hectares of poppy. Civil disobedience--women and children blocking the road to halt AEF vehicles--is becoming more frequent, and Governor Wafa on March 26 encouraged residents in Nad Ali's Marja sub-district to continue this practice. Noted trafficker Abdur Raman Jan controls 3000-5000 hectares in Marja, and his MP son helped organize these protests. When allowed to operate, the AEF is capable of significant eradication throughout Helmand's poppy-rich central districts. (NOTE: The GOA does not conduct "forced eradication;" it only permits eradication in coordination with the local community. END NOTE)

THE ROLE OF PRESIDENT KARZAI

14. (C) President Karzai told Ambassador on March 27 that, in spite of reservations about eradication's utility, he would support the AEF's efforts to eradicate an additional 5000 hectares in Helmand (ref A). This marked Karzai's first statement of support for eradication since January when he refused to permit the use of herbicides to eliminate poppies (ref B). On March 29, Karzai traveled to Helmand to meet with Governor Wafa and the UK military's Task Force Helmand. Security is the primary point on the agenda, but we know that Karzai said he would carry a tough message to Governor Wafa on the need for greater engagement on eradication. However, Karzai also is trying to get his own feel for governance in Helmand and what he needs to do to succeed in a tough military campaign that is now the most violent of anywhere in Afghanistan. How he plays the counter-narcotics message will be related to the overall battle for Helmand.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNOR Wafa

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15. (C) The fact that the AEF resumed operations on the day of President Karzai's visit to Helmand offers little surprise. Wafa is vulnerable to criticism on his eradication performance. Wafa's own Governor-Led Eradication (GLE) efforts have been a failure, and he needs to show President Karzai something behind his token efforts. Despite having more provincial resources than any other Afghan governor, his GLE teams can claim only 287 hectares of eradication in the heartland of Afghanistan's poppy-belt. By comparison, neighboring Kandahar has 4828 hectares this year, and Helmand's previous Governor led a GLE effort that eradicated 3166 hectares of poppy in 2006.

16. (C) Wafa's support for the AEF's activities has been inconsistent. He initially helped the AEF establish local connections, appointing an eradication commission and local jirga to assist the AEF in obtaining community consent to operate. Allegations of corruption, however, plagued these ad hoc bodies, and the jirga too often used its influence to steer the AEF away from the richest fields. When the AEF rejected the jirga's guidance, they encountered security threats, civil disobedience, and political opposition that shut down their operations. In March, the AEF has only been free to operate on 14 of 29 days. Wafa offered little assistance in keeping the AEF in the field, and we have learned that he promised a delegation of elders from Marja that there would be no more eradication in Nad Ali. The AEF eradicated 2725 hectares in Nad Ali (355 in Marja sub-district); in 2006 UNODC estimates that Nad Ali cultivated 11,652 hectares, and projections point to more this year. There remains plenty of room for continued eradication in the district, especially in Marja, but we cannot get there without the Governor's support.

THE ROLE OF ISAF AND TASK FORCE HELMAND

17. (C/NF) Task Force Helmand's (TF-H) Chief of Staff recently told INL's AEF program manager that the AEF has set

back security progress in Helmand by 12 months. We depend on TF-H for in extremis support only, and the AEF coordinates all of its movements through liaison officers who reside at the PRT in Lashkar Gah. Yet, the UK's TF-H continues to complain about the AEF's operations, arguing that the AEF drives residents into the arms of the Taliban and interferes with critical security operations. On March 28 the AEF reached agreement with TF-H to operate in a narrow band running South from Lashkar Gah through Nawayi Barakazayi district.

COMMENT

18. (C) Each step the AEF takes in Helmand requires negotiations among central, provincial, and local authorities and with Task Force Helmand. When the AEF is working well these negotiations become more pitched. Our hope is that Karzai's visit to Helmand will motivate greater support for the AEF's activities, and we have a simple litmus test to measure this cooperation: freedom to operate. When the AEF is unshackled and free to identify its own targets, it can eradicate significant swaths of poppy. We are sensitive to the fact that kinetic operations limit the scope of this freedom. We know that there is a difficult counter-insurgency fight shaping up in the most difficult province for ISAF and that we are significantly pushing the edge of the envelope. That said, we are less impressed by provincial and district arguments that the AEF is unfairly targeting some districts rather than others. The AEF follows the richest poppy growth in hopes of targeting the worst offenders, and efforts to prevent this smack of government weakness and corruption. We will keep pressing to balance counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency without letting either derail the other.

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